

# A Storm in the Mountains

by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn

POEM

## BEFORE YOU READ

In “A Storm in the Mountains,” the speaker and his friend are camping in the mountains at night when suddenly a violent storm erupts. In this prose poem—a mixture of poetry and nature essay—the writer examines the dangerous beauty of nature.

## LITERARY FOCUS: PROSE POEMS

A **prose poem** looks like a short essay. It’s written in **prose**—in sentences and paragraphs—as you’d see in stories, essays, and articles. Prose poems, however, like other poems, contain striking **images**, or word pictures that appeal to one or more of the five senses: sight, touch, hearing, taste, and smell.

- “A Storm in the Mountains” is full of images, vivid descriptions of an unforgettable storm. Look for those images as you read, and let those images take you to the mountaintop along with the poem’s speaker.
- When you have finished reading “A Storm in the Mountains,” think of ways it is like a poem and ways it is like a brief essay.



### Reading Standard 3.1 (Grade 8 Review)

Determine and articulate the relationship between the purposes and characteristics of different forms of poetry (e.g., ballad, lyric, couplet, epic, elegy, ode, sonnet).



# A Storm in the Mountains

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *translated by Michael Glenny*

## IDENTIFY

Pause at line 3. What is the “it” the speaker refers to?

## IMAGERY

Re-read lines 4–11. Underline images that describe the darkness. Circle images that describe the light.

## IMAGERY

Circle the imagery in lines 17–21 that brings the description of lightning to life.

## INTERPRET

Circle the **simile** in lines 22–24. What does it mean?

It caught us one pitch-black night at the foot of the pass. We crawled out of our tents and ran for shelter as it came towards us over the ridge.

Everything was black—no peaks, no valleys, no horizon to be seen, only the searing flashes of lightning separating darkness from light, and the gigantic peaks of Belaya-Kaya and Djuguturlyuchat<sup>1</sup> looming up out of the night. The huge black pine trees around us seemed as high as the mountains themselves. For a split second we felt ourselves on terra firma;<sup>2</sup> then once more everything would be plunged into darkness and chaos.

The lightning moved on, brilliant light alternating with pitch blackness, flashing white, then pink, then violet, the mountains and pines always springing back in the same place, their hugeness filling us with awe; yet when they disappeared we could not believe that they had ever existed.

The voice of the thunder filled the gorge, drowning the ceaseless roar of the rivers. Like the arrows of Sabaoth,<sup>3</sup> the lightning flashes rained down on the peaks, then split up into serpentine streams as though bursting into spray against the rock face, or striking and then shattering like a living thing.

As for us, we forgot to be afraid of the lightning, the thunder, and the downpour, just as a droplet in the ocean has no fear of a hurricane. Insignificant yet grateful, we became part of this world—a primal world in creation before our eyes.

1. **Belaya-Kaya** (bye-lī’ə kī’ə) and **Djuguturlyuchat**

(djōō·gōō·tōōr·lyōō’chət): two mountains in Russia.

2. **terra firma** (ter’ə fur’mə): Latin expression meaning “solid ground.”

3. **Sabaoth** (sab’ā-äth’): biblical term meaning “armies.”

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## A Storm in the Mountains

**Questionnaire** For each question below, write at least one response. If you quote directly from the poem, use quotation marks. A response to the first question has been provided as an example.

1. Where is the speaker as the storm begins?

He is at the foot of a mountain pass, at night, in a tent.

2. What is the storm like at first?

3. Why does the speaker feel he is on "terra firma" when lightning flashes?

4. How is the lightning described?

5. What sounds does the speaker hear?

6. What is the lightning compared to as it rains down on the peaks?

7. How does the storm change the speaker's ideas about people and nature?

### Test Practice

## A Storm in the Mountains

Sharpen your test-taking skills by completing the sample test item below. Then, read the explanation in the right-hand column.

Sample Test Item	Explanation of the Correct Answer
<p>Which of the following is <i>not</i> an <b>image</b>?</p> <p><b>A</b> serpentine streams</p> <p><b>B</b> voice of the thunder</p> <p><b>C</b> the ridge</p> <p><b>D</b> huge black pine trees</p>	<p>The correct answer is C. It names a thing; it is not a vivid description.</p> <p>Items <i>A</i>, <i>B</i>, and <i>D</i> do name images—things you can take in through the senses.</p>

**DIRECTIONS:** Circle the letter of the correct response.



**Reading  
Standard 3.1  
(Grade 8  
Review)**

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- What makes "A Storm in the Mountains" a **prose poem**?
  - It has rhyme.
  - It has powerful images.
  - It is in paragraph form.
  - The speaker reveals his thoughts.
- The image in the line "ceaseless roar of the rivers" appeals mostly to which of the senses?
  - sight
  - hearing
  - taste
  - smell
- To the speaker, the lightning flashes are like—
  - a colorless event
  - something not to be thankful for
  - a war fought with bows and arrows
  - the beginning of the world
- The **imagery** in "A Storm in the Mountains" evokes a feeling of—
  - wonder
  - sorrow
  - silliness
  - hate

# Chapter 7

Additional teaching material for this selection is available in the *Holt Literature and Language Arts Teacher's Edition*.

## OBJECTIVES

Students will—

- Recognize a prose poem.
- Understand how imagery affects a prose poem.

## TEACHING RESOURCES

Graphic Organizers,  
*Teacher's Edition*, Section 3  
Transparencies for Modeling  
Instruction, *Teacher's Edition*,  
Section 4  
Audio CD Library  
Audio Tutor CD

## A Storm in the Mountains

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn *translated by Michael Glenny* ▪ page 219

### SUMMARY

*This prose poem re-creates the speaker's experience of a fierce night-time lightning storm in a high mountain pass where he is camped. As the colors and sounds of the storm explode around him, he and his companions are first frightened, then awed, and finally grateful, feeling a deep sense of connection to the natural world.*

### Introduce the Literary Focus: Prose Poems

- Have the class study the Literary Focus on page 219 of *Interactive Reading*. Write the term **prose poem** on the board. Ask students to define the term.
- Next, write the words *sight*, *hearing*, *touch*, *smell*, and *taste* on the board. Ask students which of the five senses each of these items appeals to: a blinking traffic light, alcohol rubbed on a cut, a cake baking in the oven, a bouncing tennis ball, a glossy (shiny) page in a magazine. Students can suggest additional examples and perhaps create a chart of items and the senses they appeal to.
- Then, write the term **imagery** on the board. Tell students that imagery is language that appeals to one or more of the five senses. Explain that prose poems, like other poems, use vivid images to help the reader picture and feel what the writer is saying.

### Model and Teach the Interactive Reading

- Have a volunteer read the first two paragraphs of the poem aloud (page 220).
- Call on volunteers to restate difficult passages from the poem in simpler language—for example, the first two sentences of the poem might be paraphrased this way: “One dark night the storm came up very suddenly. Our tent was at the bottom of the pass. We quickly ran for shelter.”
- Have students read the rest of the prose poem independently, using the sidenotes to guide them.
- Encourage students to visualize the images as they read. Remind them to think about how the images make them feel.
- Have students work in small groups to discuss their responses to the poem.



#### Reading Standard 3.1 (Grade 8 Review)

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## Assess

- Own the Poem, SE page 221
- Standards Review: Literature, SE page 222
- *Progress Assessment of Reading, Vocabulary, and Literature*, pages 121–123

## DIFFERENTIATING INSTRUCTION

### A Storm in the Mountains



- **Learners Having Difficulty** Students can listen to the prose poem on the Audio CD before reading it on their own. Point out that the reader pauses at commas and stops at periods. After students have read the prose poem, they might enjoy drawing or painting the scene it describes.
- **Advanced Students** After reading the prose poem, students might turn it into a poem with rhyme and meter. They should feel free to vary the text to suit their needs.

## TEACHER TO TEACHER

If the term *prose poem* is difficult for students to grasp, you might compare the genre to a short descriptive or narrative essay, in which the writer sets a scene and may provide brief action.